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SUBJECT: CZECHS STRUGGLE TO ADVANCE EU POSITION ON BURMA

REF: A. LISBON 3145  
1B. STATE 164893  
1C. PRAGUE 1212  
1D. PRAGUE 1169  
1E. PRAGUE 1158  
1F. PRAGUE 1124

1. (SBU) Czech MFA officials in the Asia Pacific, and Human Rights and Transition Policy Departments were eager to hear our perspective on the current situation in Burma. They spoke about their efforts to move the EU beyond a "wait and see" approach as well as their work on a bilateral basis. They also offered ideas on how to engage Burma's neighbors through support for Burmese refugees in these countries and the need to rally around Gambari.

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EU - Waiting on Developments  
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12. (SBU) Marek Libricky, Deputy Director in the Asia Pacific Department, indicated that at the December 11 EU experts meeting on Burmese sanctions they discussed whether to take a positive (provide incentives) or negative (sanctions) approach to Burma. There are EU opponents to both options, so for the time being the EU is taking the "wait and see" approach. At the meeting, Libricky indicated that EU member states specifically debated financial sanctions against the three state-owned banks that handle foreign exchange transactions for Burma. There are apparently four European banks that could be affected by such a move. Three of these banks are British and one is Swedish. According to the Czechs, each of the EU member states is evaluating now whether such a move is possible under domestic legislation. They plan to consult again (Note: it was unclear when this would occur) with an eye toward developments in Burma and decide what, if any, next steps to take. The Czechs have made clear they oppose incentives, while a few others (Spain, and perhaps Germany) are opposed to sanctions and the vast majority are simply seized with other matters closer to their front door (Kosovo, CFE, Energy Security, etc.).

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Engage Burma's Neighbors Through Support for Refugees  
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13. (SBU) The Czechs share our belief that engagement with the regime by Burma's neighbors is key. They also believe that these neighbors are reluctant to act, in part because they fear the effects of a flood of Burmese refugees if the situation deteriorates any further. According to Libricky, the Czechs proposed at the experts meeting that the EU explore providing assistance to Burmese refugees living in these neighboring countries. This, he believes, would demonstrate international community commitment to share the burden of displaced people, while also providing a

face-saving measure to some financially-strapped neighbors facing a potential wave of refugees. He was disheartened, however, because he noted that this went over like a lead balloon with his EU counterparts.

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Multiple Entry Visa for Gambari?  
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¶4. (SBU) During the discussion of the difficulties UN Special Advisor Gambari has faced each and every time he has attempted to travel to Burma, the Czechs think the international community should rally around Gambari and pressure the Burmese regime to grant Gambari a multiple-entry visa. In their opinion, as representative of the UN Secretary General, Gambari should not have to request a visa

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from the regime every time he wishes to visit Burma.

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Exploring Additional Bilateral Efforts  
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¶5. (SBU) In addition to humanitarian assistance, the Czechs already are funding human rights and democratic transition projects in several areas to help Burmese citizens (reftel f). Both Czech MFA departments noted that with so little happening on the EU front, they are exploring augmenting bilateral funding for a few additional proposals from the Czech NGOs People in Need and Burma Center Prague, both of which have expressed an interest in capacity building targeted at a handful of Burmese student leaders.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: We have an enthusiastic ally in the Czechs on this topic. They were clearly pleased that we sought their input on how to move the ball forward on Burma. These officials did not hesitate to share their insights into EU dynamics on this topic and they are clearly trying to think

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creatively about ways to effect change. While they appeared disheartened that the EU is moving slowly in this area, it is their stated intention to continue pressing ahead bilaterally and within the EU.

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